

NOTE: H.J. Res. 109, approved September 29, was assigned Public Law No. 106–275.

The President's Radio Address *September 30, 2000*

Good morning. This has been a good week for America. As our athletes continue to pile up medals in Sydney, our economy continues to break records at home. This week we learned that household income had reached an all-time high, poverty a 20-year low; the budget surplus is the largest on record; and for the first time in 12 years, thanks largely to the Children's Health Insurance Program, the number of Americans without health insurance has declined by over 1½ million.

Today I want to talk with you about making the most of this moment, by putting our children's education first and building better schools for them.

This fall our schools opened their doors to the largest number of students in history. We have to work hard to give them the best education in history. We're working to turn our schools around, with higher standards, stronger accountability, and more investment. Reading, math, and SAT scores are up. So are high school graduation and college-going rates. We dramatically increased Head Start, after-school, and summer school programs. The number of students in States with core curriculum standards has increased from 14 to 49, and in State after State, failing schools are being turned around. With the Vice President's E-rate program, we've helped connect 95 percent of our schools to the Internet, and we're in the process of hiring 100,000 high-quality teachers to reduce class size in the early grades.

But it's hard for students to lift themselves up in schools that are falling down. Across our Nation, students are struggling to learn in schools that are crowded and crumbling. I visited schools all over the country where this is so: a school in Florida where classes were held not in one or two but 12 trailers; a school in Queens, where there were 400 more students than the school was built for; a school in Virginia, where the electrical service in some classrooms is so poor that if you plug in a new

computer in the wall, the circuit breaker cuts off. This is a challenge all across our country. In cities and rural areas, small towns and Native American communities, the average American school building is now more than 40 years old. The estimated price tag to bring our schools into good condition—\$127 billion.

Today I'm releasing a new Department of Education analysis that highlights the nationwide need to build new schools and modernize existing ones. The study provides a State-by-State report card that shows that at least 60 percent of the schools in every State are in need of repair. Many States and local communities are working to fix their schools, but too many school districts simply don't have the tax base to handle the burden alone.

That's why I've proposed a school construction tax credit to help communities build or modernize 6,000 schools and, also, grants and loans for emergency repairs in nearly 5,000 schools a year for 5 years.

The good news is, we have a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives ready right now to pass school construction relief. But the Republican leadership continues to stand in the way and refuses to bring it to a vote. Every day they stall is another day our children are forced to go to school in trailers, overcrowded classrooms, and crumbling buildings. Congress must act now.

In a larger sense, this is about our priorities and values. The schools I attended as a child were fairly old, but they were very well-maintained. They sent every student a clear message: You are important; we take your education seriously. That's how my parents' generation kept faith with us, and how we must keep faith with our children.

But the clock is ticking. At midnight tonight the fiscal year runs out. Congress still hasn't sent me a budget for education and other pressing priorities. Yet, they have found the time, first, to pass huge, fiscally irresponsible tax cuts

and then, after I vetoed them, to load up the spending bills with hundreds of millions of dollars in special interest projects. In one appropriations bill alone, there is \$668 million in extra projects. That's enough to do emergency repairs in 2,500 schools, to send another one million children to after-school programs, to hire over 15,000 teachers to lower class size.

Not long ago, Senator McCain said porkbarrel spending, and I quote, "has lurched completely out of control." Well, it's time to turn off the porkbarrel spigot and deliver for our children's future.

That's why I've told my budget team to seek final negotiations on an education budget that stays true to our values and our children's long-term needs. We're not going to leave the table until we invest in modernizing our schools and continue our efforts to hire 100,000 quality teachers for smaller classes. We're going to keep

fighting to strengthen accountability, to turn around failing schools or shut them down or put them under new management, to expand after-school programs and college opportunities for young people, and to ensure a qualified teacher in every classroom. Our children deserve 21st century schools.

In this time of prosperity, we have a responsibility to make sure they get no less. By building stronger schools, we'll build a stronger America in the future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:48 p.m. on September 29 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 30. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 29 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks on College Financial Assistance October 2, 2000

Give her another hand. Wasn't she great? [Applause] Good job. Thank you. You know, I thought I'd be having withdrawal today, after the Olympics—[laughter]—and I was wondering what I would do for an encore, and the answer was, meet Raquel. [Laughter] Thank you very much for being here and for your example.

And Secretary Riley, to you and to all these wonderful people at the Department of Education, I thank you for the astonishing work you've done on the student loan program and on student assistance, generally.

When I ran for President in 1991, late 1991 and 1992, I talked a lot about redoing the student loan program and increasing access to financial assistance through grants, work study, tax credits, and an improved student loan program. I'll never forget one night; it was about 1990, I think. I was then serving as Governor of my home State, and I was up in Fayetteville, Arkansas, which is the home of the University of Arkansas, and a friend of mine and I went out to a coffee shop to have a cup of coffee. And I did what I always do; I went around and shook hands with everybody at all the tables in there. [Laughter] And there were three young

students there having coffee, so I sat down and started talking to them. Two of them were planning to drop out of school. They were already in college—I'll never forget this. And I asked them why in the world they would do that, given the fact that the economy that they would live in for their adult lives put a higher premium on education than ever before. And both of them said they had to go ahead and get out and work for a couple of years because they knew they could not meet their student loan repayment schedule. And they didn't want to take the money and not be able to pay it back. And it had a searing impact on me. So I said, "Surely, these people are the exception to the rule," so I started nosing around and come to find out there were a lot of people like this. And that's basically how we got into the idea of the direct student loan with the option to repay as a percentage of your income.

I also found a lot of young people who wanted to be teachers, like Raquel, or police officers or nurses, who instead were taking jobs that they found less rewarding but paid more money so they could meet their loan repayment schedule.